

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 ACDA-10 CIAE-00 INR-07 IO-14 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 EB-08 NRC-07 OES-07 FEAE-00
DODE-00 ERDA-07 SS-15 SP-02 PA-02 PRS-01 USIA-15
PM-05 DHA-02 /123 W
-----045007 021653Z /50

R 021451Z AUG 77
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6733

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 12709

PASS NRC, ERDA

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ENRG, TECH, UK
SUBJECT: WARNING ON "PLUTONIUM ECONOMY"

REF: LONDON 12108

THE FOLLOWING IS THE TEXT OF AN ARTICLE BY ROGER
BERTHOUD IN THE LONDON TIMES OF AUGUST 2:

"IF BRITAIN OPTS FOR THE "PLUTONIUM ECONOMY", THE
PRICE OF SAFE NUCLEAR POWER COULD PROVE TO INCLUDE A
SLOW BUT INEXORABLE EROSION OF CIVIL LIBERTIES, HUMAN
RIGHTS AND THE RULE OF LAW".

THAT WARNING COMES FROM MR. PAUL SIEGHART, JOINT
CHAIRMAN OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF JUSTICE (THE
BRITISH SECTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF
JURISTS) IN THE JUNE ISSUE OF THE COMMISSION'S REVIEW.

MR. SIEGHART POINTS OUT THAT "REACTOR-GRADE"
URANIUM CANNOT BE USED TO MAKE NUCLEAR BOMBS. ON THE
OTHER HAND, REACTOR-GRADE PLUTONIUM CAN BE. PLUTONIUM
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IS A FISSILE ELEMENT WHICH CAN BE RECOVERED BY RE-
PROCESSING "SPENT" URANIUM. USED IN THE RIGHT PROPOR-
TIONS WITH URANIUM TO FUEL THE NEW KIND OF REACTOR
CALLED THE "FAST BREEDER", IT CAN REPRODUCE ITSELF.

ONLY SIX TO TEN KILOGRAMS OF REACTOR-GRADE PLU-
TONIUM WOULD BE NEEDED TO MAKE A PLUTONIUM BOMB

EQUIVALENT TO THOUSANDS OF TONS OF CONVENTIONAL HIGH EXPLOSIVE AND YIELDING A GREAT DEAL OF HIGHLY DANGEROUS RADIOACTIVE MATERIAL.

PLUTONIUM, MR. SIEGHART POINTS OUT, IS NOT ONLY THE WORLD'S MOST POWERFUL SINGLE EXPLOSIVE, BUT ALSO ONE OF THE MOST CARCINOGENIC (CANCER-INDUCING) MATERIALS KNOWN, A COMBINATION MAKING IT "QUITE THE MOST DANGEROUS SUBSTANCE SO FAR KNOWN ON THIS PLANET".

BASING HIS CALCULATIONS ON PLUTONIUM'S CAPACITY, AS A FUEL FOR POWER STATION REACTORS, TO PRODUCE FOR EACH KILOGRAM AS MUCH ENERGY AS 1,700 TONNES OF OIL, MR. SIEGHART ESTIMATES ITS VALUE AS AROUND 40,000 POUNDS PER KG, ROUGHLY 40 TIMES MORE THAN GOLD.

TO THE TERRORIST A FEW KILOGRAMS COULD BE PRICELESS. HE COULD THREATEN TO DISPERSE IT AS A FINE POWDER, WHICH WOULD RENDER LARGE TRACTS OF LAND UNINHABITABLE (BECAUSE OF ITS CARCINOGENICITY) OR TO DETONATE IT IN A NUCLEAR WEAPON.

FOR VARIOUS TECHNICAL REASONS IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO ACCOUNT FOR EVERY GRAM. IF COMMERCIAL FAST BREEDER REACTORS WERE BROUGHT INTO SERVICE NEW MATERIAL UNACCOUNTED FOR WOULD RAPIDLY TOTAL HUNDREDS OF KILOGRAMS

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MR. SIEGHART SAYS.

HOW COULD THE PUBLIC BE PROTECTED WHEN A SUBSTANCE SO LETHAL IS IN CONSTANT PRODUCTION AND CONSTANTLY BEING TRANSPORTED FROM REPROCESSING PLANTS TO REACTORS, HE ASKS.

TO PREVENT THE ABSTRACTION FROM A PLANT OF A FEW HUNDRED GRAMS OF PLUTONIUM CONSTANT SURVEILLANCE WOULD BE NECESSARY OF EVERYONE WHO HANDLES IT OR HAS ANY POSSIBLE ACCESS TO IT. TO BE EFFECTIVE, THAT SHOULD ALSO EXTEND TO FAMILIES, FRIENDS AND ASSOCIATES, AND TO ANYONE LIKELY TO TRY TO BLACKMAIL OR INTIMIDATE THEM, MR. SIEGHART BELIEVES.

SURVEILLANCE WOULD ALSO BE NECESSARY OF INDIVIDUALS OR GROUPS WHO MIGHT HAVE POLITICAL OR ECONOMIC MOTIVES FOR ABSTRACTING PLUTONIUM. AS FOR THE HAZARDS OF TRANSIT IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT FOR ARMED GUARDS NOT ACCOUNTABLE TO THE POLICE TO ACCOMPANY CONSIGNMENTS ON TRUCKS OR TRAINS.

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 ACDA-10 CIAE-00 INR-07 IO-14 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 EB-08 NRC-07 OES-07 FEAE-00
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R 021451Z AUG 77
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IF A CREDIBLE THREAT WAS RECEIVED FROM TERRORISTS
CLAIMING TO POSSESS A PLUTONIUM BOMB, THE GOVERNMENT
WOULD HAVE TO TAKE ALL NECESSARY POWERS FOR GENERAL
SEARCH, SEIZURE AND ARREST.

IF A SUSPECT WAS APPREHENDED, "IT IS INHERENTLY
UNLIKELY THAT HIS INTERROGATION WOULD TAKE THE LEIS-
URELY AND HUMANE FORM THAT THE LAW REQUIRES", HE
WRITES.

ONCE A TERRORIST GROUP HAD MOBILIZED WORLDWIDE
PUBLICITY IN THAT WAY, SUCH EMERGENCIES MIGHT BECOME
A REGULAR FEATURE OF LIFE.

THIS PICTURE, MR. SIEGHART STATES, IS WIDELY
ACCEPTED AS REALISTIC. HE CITES AS EVIDENCE THE
FLOWERS REPORT ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION AND A MEETING
BETWEEN MR. WEDGWOOD BENN, THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR
ENERGY, AND TWO OFFICERS OF JUSTICE, AT WHICH NOTHING
WAS SAID TO MAKE SUCH A POSSIBILITY SEEM FANCIFUL.

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MR. SIEGHART FINDS IT DIFFICULT TO RESIST THE
CONCLUSION THAT "THE EASIEST PATH TOWARDS A POLICE
STATE, IN ANY MODERN SOCIETY WHICH IS NOT ONE ALREADY,
WOULD BE FOR THAT SOCIETY TO OPT FOR A PLUTONIUM
ECONOMY".

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Control Number: n/a
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Sent Date: 02-Aug-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
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Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
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